THE WOMEN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

HITCHCOCK AND FEMINIST THEORY

TANIA MODLESKI

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To my mother and father

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INTRODUCTION

Hitchcock, Feminism, and the Patriarchal Unconscious

■

Hitchcock and Feminist Film Theory

In providing for a number of his films to be withheld from circulation for rerelease many years later, Alfred Hitchcock has ensured that his popularity with a fickle filmgoing public remains as strong as ever. With this ploy, by which he has managed to continue wielding an unprecedented power over a mass audience, Hitchcock betrays a resemblance to one of his favorite character types—the person who exerts an influence from beyond the grave. That this person is often a woman—Rebecca in the film of the same name, Carlotta and Madeleine in *Vertigo*, Mrs. Bates in *Psycho*—is not without interest or relevance to the thesis of this book: Hitchcock's great need (exhibited throughout his life as well as in his death) to insist on and exert authorial control may be related to the fact that his films are always in danger of being subverted by females whose power is both fascinating and seemingly limitless.

Such ghostly manipulations on Hitchcock's part would be ineffective, however, were it not for the fact that the films themselves possess an extraordinary hold on the public's imagination. Of course, some critics have been inclined to dismiss the films' appeal by attributing it simply to the mass audience's desire for sensational violence—usually directed against women—and "cheap, erotic" thrills, to quote "Mrs. Bates." While these critics find themselves increasingly in the minority, it is nevertheless somewhat surprising to reflect on the extent to which *feminists* have found themselves compelled, intrigued, infuriated, and inspired by Hitchcock's works.

In fact, the films of Hitchcock have been central to the formulation of feminist film theory and to the practice of feminist film criticism. Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which may be considered the founding document of psychoanalytic feminist film theory, focuses on Hitchcock's films in order to show how women in classic Hollywood cinema are inevitably made into passive objects of male voyeuristic

and sadistic impulses; how they exist simply to fulfill the desires and express the anxieties of the men in the audience; and how, by implication, women filmgoers can only have a masochistic relation to this cinema.[1] Since the publication of Mulvey's essay in 1975, a number of feminist articles on Hitchcock films have tended to corroborate her insights.

Believing that the representation of women in film is more complicated than Mulvey's article allows, I published an article in 1982 on Hitchcock's first American film, *Rebecca*, which was based on the best selling "female Gothic" novel by Daphne du Maurier (this essay is included, in modified form, in the present volume).[2] There I argued that some films do allow for the (limited) expression of a specifically female desire and that such films, instead of following the male oedipal journey, which film theorists like Raymond Bellour see as the trajectory of *all* Hollywood narrative, trace a female oedipal trajectory, and in the process reveal some of the difficulties for women in becoming socialized in patriarchy.[3] Subsequently, Teresa de Lauretis in *Alice Doesn't* referred to that essay and to Hitchcock's films *Rebecca* and *Vertigo* to develop a theory of the female spectator. According to de Lauretis, identification on the part of women at the cinema is much more complicated than feminist theory has understood: far from being simply masochistic, the female spectator is always caught up in a double desire, identifying at one and the same time not only with the passive (female) object, but with the active (usually male) subject.[4]

Mulvey herself has had occasion to rethink some of her essay's main points and has done so in part through a reading of Hitchcock's *Notorious* that qualifies the condemnation of narrative found in "Visual Pleasure."[5] Other feminists have returned, almost obsessively, to Hitchcock in order to take up other issues, fight other battles. In an extremely interesting essay on *The Birds*, for example, Susan Lurie analyzes a segment that has also been analyzed by Raymond Bellour: the ride out and back across Bodega Bay. Lurie is concerned to dispute the Lacanian theory relied on so heavily by Bellour and Mulvey—particularly in the latter's argument that woman's body signifies lack and hence connotes castration for the male. In Lurie's view, women like Melanie Daniels in *The Birds* are threatening not because they automatically connote castration, but because they *don't*, and so the project of narrative cinema is precisely to "castrate" the woman whose strength and perceived wholeness arouses dread in the male.[6] Thus, if de Lauretis is primarily interested in complicating Mulvey's implied notion of femininity, Lurie is chiefly concerned with questioning certain aspects of Mulvey's theory of masculinity and masculine development. And both develop their arguments through important readings of Hitchcock's films.

Recently, Robin Wood, a male critic who has been a proponent of Hitchcock's films for many years, has become interested in these issues.[7]

In the 1960s, Wood's book—the first in English on Hitchcock—set out to address the question, "Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?" In the 1980s, Wood declares, the question must be, "Can Hitchcock be saved for feminism?"—though his very language, implying the necessity of rescuing a favorite auteur from feminist obloquy, suggests that the question is fundamentally a rhetorical one. And indeed, although Wood claims in his essay not to be interested in locating "an uncontaminated feminist discourse in the films," he proceeds to minimize the misogyny in them and to analyze both *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* as exposés of the twisted logic of patriarchy, relatively untroubled by ambivalence or contradiction.

It may be symptomatic that in contrast to the female critics I have mentioned, the stated goal of the one male critic concerned with feminism is to reestablish the authority of the artist—to "save" Hitchcock. For Wood, political "progressiveness" has come to replace moral complexity as the criterion by which to judge Hitchcock's art, but the point remains the same—to justify the ways of the auteur to the filmgoing public. The feminist critics I have mentioned, by contrast, use Hitchcock's works as a means to elucidate issues and problems relevant to women in patriarchy. In so doing these critics implicitly challenge and decenter directorial authority by considering Hitchcock's work as the expression of cultural attitudes and practices existing to some extent outside the artist's control. My own work is in the irreverent spirit of this kind of feminist criticism and is, if anything, more explicitly "deconstructionist" than this criticism has generally tended to be. Thus, one of my book's main theses is that time and again in Hitchcock films, the strong fascination and identification with femininity revealed in them subverts the claims to mastery and authority not only of the male characters but of the director himself.

This is not to say that I am entirely unsympathetic to Wood's position. Indeed, this critic's work seems to me an important corrective to studies which see in Hitchcock only the darkest misogynistic vision. But what I want to argue is *neither* that Hitchcock is utterly misogynistic *nor* that he is largely sympathetic to women and their plight in patriarchy, but that his work is characterized by a thoroughgoing ambivalence about femininity—which explains why it has been possible for critics to argue with some plausibility on either side of the issue. It also, of course, explains why the issue can never be resolved and why, when one is reading criticism defending or attacking Hitchcock's treatment of women, one continually experiences a feeling of "yes, but . . ." This book aims to account, often through psychoanalytic explanations, for the ambivalence in the work of Hitchcock. In the process, it continually demonstrates that despite the often considerable violence with which women are treated in Hitchcock's films, they remain resistant to patriarchal assimilation.

In order to explain the ambivalence in these films, I will be especially

concerned with showing the ways in which masculine identity is bound up with feminine identity—both at the level of society as well as on the individual, psychological level. In this respect, the book will confirm that what Fredric Jameson says about ruling class literature is also true of patriarchal cultural production. According to Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, consciousness on the part of the oppressed classes, expressed, "initially, in the unarticulated form of rage, helplessness, victimization, oppression by a common enemy," generates a "mirror image of class solidarity among the ruling groups. . . . This suggests . . . that the *truth* of ruling-class consciousness . . . is to be found in working-class consciousness."[8] Similarly, in Hitchcock, the "truth" of patriarchal consciousness lies in feminist consciousness and depends precisely on the depiction of victimized women found so often in his films. The paradox is such, then, that male solidarity (between characters, director, spectators, as the case may be) entails giving expression to women's feelings of "rage, helplessness, victimization, oppression." This point is of the greatest consequence for a theory of the female spectator. As I argue in the chapters on *Blackmail* and *Notorious*, insofar as Hitchcock films repeatedly reveal the way women are oppressed in patriarchy, they allow the female spectator to feel an anger that is very different from the masochistic response imputed to her by some feminist critics.

Not only is it possible to argue that feminist consciousness is the mirror of patriarchal consciousness, but one might argue as well that the patriarchal *un*conscious lies in femininity (which is not, however, to equate femininity with the unconscious). Psychoanalysis has shown that the process by which the male child comes to set the mother at a distance is of very uncertain outcome, which helps to explain why it is continually necessary for man to face the threat woman poses and to work to subdue that threat both in life and in art. The dynamics of identification and identity, I will argue, are fraught with difficulties and paradoxes that are continually reflected and explored in Hitchcock films.[9] To take an example suggestive of Jameson's mirror metaphor, when Scottie Ferguson in *Vertigo* begins investigating the mysterious Madeleine Elster, the first point of view shot shows him as a mirror image of the woman, and the rest of the film traces the vicissitudes of Scottie's attempts to reassert a masculinity lost when he failed in his performance of the law.

By focusing on the problematics of identity and identification, then, this study aims to insert itself in the debates circulating around Hitchcock's films and to examine some of the key theoretical issues developed in the various critiques. On the one hand, the book seeks to engage the problem of the female spectator, especially in the analysis of those films told from the woman's point of view (i.e., *Blackmail*, *Rebecca*, and *Notorious*). But even some of those films which seem exclusively to adopt the male point

of view, like *Murder!*, *Rear Window*, or *Vertigo*, may be said either to have woman as the ultimate point of identification or to place the spectator—regardless of gender—in a classically "feminine" position. On the other hand, then, my intent is to problematize *male* spectatorship and masculine identity in general. The analysis will reveal that the question which continually—if sometimes implicitly—rages around Hitchcock's work as to whether he is sympathetic towards women or misogynistic is fundamentally unanswerable because he is both.[10] Indeed, as we shall see, the misogyny and the sympathy actually entail one another—just as Norman Bates's close relationship with his mother provokes his lethal aggression towards other women.

The Female Spectator

As the figure of Norman Bates suggests, what both male and female spectators are likely to see in the mirror of Hitchcock's films are images of ambiguous sexuality that threaten to destabilize the gender identity of protagonists and viewers alike. Although in *Psycho* the mother/son relationship is paramount, I will argue that in films from *Rebecca* on it is more often the mother/daughter relationship that evokes this threat to identity and constitutes the main "problem" of the films. In *Vertigo*, for example, Madeleine is the (great grand)daughter of Carlotta Valdez who seems to possess the heroine so thoroughly that the latter loses her individuality. *Rebecca*'s heroine experiences a similar difficulty in relation to the powerful Rebecca, first wife of the heroine's husband. Marnie's main "problem"—as far as patriarchy is concerned—is an excessive attachment to her mother that prevents her from achieving a "normal," properly "feminine," sexual relationship with a man. In other films, the mother figure is actually a mother-in-law, but one who so closely resembles the heroine, it is impossible to escape the suspicion that the mother/daughter relationship is actually what is being evoked. In *Notorious*, both Alicia and her mother-in-law have blonde hair and foreign accents; and in *The Birds*, there is an uncanny resemblance between Melanie Daniels and Mitch's mother, Lydia. In all these films, moreover, Hitchcock manipulates point of view in such a way that the spectator him/herself is made to share the strong sense of identification with the (m)other.

As feminists have recently stressed, the mother/daughter relationship is one of the chief factors contributing to the bisexuality of women—a notion that several critics have argued is crucial to any theory of the female spectator seeking to rescue women from "silence, marginality, and absence." Very soon after the publication of Mulvey's essay, feminist critics began to approach this idea of female bisexuality in order to begin to explain women's experience of film. A consideration of this experience, they felt,

was lacking in Mulvey's work, which thereby seemed to collaborate unwittingly in patriarchy's plot to render women invisible. In a much quoted discussion among film critics and filmmakers Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage, Judith Mayne, B. Ruby Rich, and Anna Marie Taylor that appeared in *New German Critique* in 1978, one of the major topics was the bisexuality of the female spectator. In the course of the discussion, the participants, attempting to counter what might be called the "compulsory heterosexuality" of mainstream film, concluded that more attention needs to be paid to women's erotic attraction to other women—to, for example, Marlene Dietrich not only as a fetishized object of male desire, which is how Mulvey had seen her, but as a female star with an "underground reputation" among lesbians as "a kind of subcultural icon."[11] Several of the participants stressed that female eroticism is obviously going to differ from male eroticism; the experience of the female spectator is bound to be more complex than a simple passive identification with the female object of desire or a straightforward role reversal—a facile assumption of the transvestite's garb. Julia Lesage insisted, "Although women's sexuality has been shaped under a dominant patriarchal culture, clearly women do not respond to women in film and the erotic element in quite the same way that men do, given that patriarchal film has the structure of a male fantasy" (p. 89). In other words, there must be other options for the female spectator than the two pithily described by B. Ruby Rich: "to identify either with Marilyn Monroe or with the man behind me hitting the back of my seat with his knees" (p. 87).

Several of the women in this discussion were strenuously anti-Freudian, claiming that Freud's framework cannot account for the position of female spectators. Recent Freudian and neo-Freudian accounts of women's psychic development in patriarchy and applications of these accounts to issues in feminist film theory have, however, suggested otherwise. Thus Gertrud Koch, addressing the question of "why women go to men's movies," refers to Freud's theory of female bisexuality, which is rooted in woman's preoedipal attachment to her mother. This attachment, it will be remembered, came as a momentous discovery to Freud and resulted in his having to revise significantly his theories of childhood sexuality and to recognize the fundamental asymmetry in male and female development.[12] The female's attachment to the mother, Freud came to understand, often goes "unresolved" throughout woman's life and coexists with her later heterosexual relationships. Hence, Teresa de Lauretis's notion of a "double desire" on the part of the female spectator—a desire that is *both* passive and active, homosexual and heterosexual. Koch speculates that men's need to prohibit and punish female voyeurism is attributable to their concern about women's pleasure in looking at other women: "Man's fear of permitting female voyeurism stems not only from fear of

women looking at other men and drawing (to him perhaps unfavorable) comparisons but is also connected to a fear that women's bisexuality could make them competitors for the male preserve."[13]

In her book, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, feminist film critic E. Ann Kaplan draws on the neo-Freudian work of Julia Kristeva to make a similar point about men's repression of the "nonsymbolic" (preoedipal) aspects of motherhood. According to Kristeva/Kaplan, patriarchy must repress these nonsymbolic aspects of motherhood because of the "homosexual components" involved in the mother/daughter relationship.[14] Elsewhere, Kaplan analyzes *Stella Dallas*, a film about an intense mother/daughter relationship, in order to argue that the process of repression is enacted in classical cinema and that the female spectator herself comes to desire this repression and to endorse the heterosexual contract that seals the film at its end.[15] Another analysis of *Stella Dallas* by Linda Williams argues against this view and persuasively postulates a contradictory "double desire" on the part of the female spectator: on the one hand, we identify with the working class Stella and share her joy at having successfully sacrificed herself in giving away her daughter to the upper-class father and boyfriend and, on the other hand, because of the way point of view has been handled in the film, we are made to experience the full poignancy and *undesirability* of the loss of the close affective relationship with the daughter.[16] In other words, we could say that the spectator simultaneously experiences the symbolic *and* the nonsymbolic aspects of motherhood, despite patriarchy's attempts to repress and deny the latter.

In stressing the contradictory nature of female spectatorship, Williams's essay can be seen as a critique not only of the position that, given the structure of classic narrative film as male fantasy, the female spectator is forced to adopt the heterosexual view, but also of the opposite position, most forcefully articulated by Mary Ann Doane, which sees the preoedipal relationship with the mother as the source of insurmountable difficulties for the female spectator. Doane draws on the work of Christian Metz and his theories of spectatorship based on male fetishism and disavowal, in order to disqualify female voyeurism. According to Doane, whose essay, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," I will consider at greater length in the next chapter, woman's putative inability to achieve a distance from the *textual* body is related to her inability to separate decisively from the *maternal* body. Because women lack a penis, they lack the possibility of losing the "first stake of representation," the mother, and thus of symbolizing their difference from her (a "problem" that we shall see is at the heart of *Rebecca*): "this closeness to the body, this excess, prevents the woman from assuming a position similar to the man's in relation to signifying systems. For she is haunted by the loss of

a loss, the lack of that lack so essential for the realization of the ideals of semiotic systems."[17] There are, I believe, several ways for feminists to challenge such a nihilistic position. One might, for example, point out the tortuous logic of these claims, as Hélène Cixous has done ("She lacks lack? Curious to put it in so contradictory, so extremely paradoxical a manner: she lacks lack. To say she lacks lack is also, after all, to say she doesn't miss lack . . . since she doesn't miss the lack of lack.")[18] Or, one might say with Linda Williams and B. Ruby Rich that the female spectator does indeed experience a "distance" from the image as an inevitable result of her being an exile "living the tension of two different cultures."[19] Or, one might, as I shall do in the chapters that follow, question the very "ideals" of the "semiotic systems" invoked by Doane—and, in particular, the ideal of "distance," or what in Brechtian theory is called "distanciation."

According to Doane, woman's closeness to the (maternal) body means that she "overidentifies with the image": "The association of tears and 'wet wasted afternoons' (in Molly Haskell's words) with genres specified as feminine (the soap opera, the 'woman's picture') points very precisely to this type of overidentification, this abolition of a distance, in short this inability to fetishize."[20] Now, as I have mentioned, many of Hitchcock's films actually thematize the "problem" of "overidentification"—the daughter's "overidentification" with the mother and, in at least one film (*Rear Window*), the woman's "overidentification" with the "textual body." Given Hitchcock's preoccupation with female bisexuality and given his famed ability to draw us into close identifications with his characters—so many of them women—his work would seem to provide the perfect testing ground for theories of female spectatorship.

But the question immediately arises as to why a male director—and one so frequently accused of unmitigated misogyny—would be attracted to such subjects. I want to suggest that woman's bisexual nature, rooted in preoedipality, and her consequent alleged tendency to overidentify with other women and with texts, is less a problem for *women*, as Doane would have it, than it is for patriarchy. And this is so not only for the reason suggested by Gertrud Koch (that female bisexuality would make women into competitors for "the male preserve"), but far more fundamentally because it reminds man of his *own* bisexuality (and thus his resemblance to Norman Bates), a bisexuality that threatens to subvert his "proper" identity, which depends upon his ability to distance woman and make her his proper-ty. In my readings of Hitchcock, I will demonstrate how men's fascination and identification with the feminine continually undermine their efforts to achieve masculine strength and autonomy and is a primary cause of the violence towards women that abounds in Hitchcock's films. These readings are meant to implicate certain Marxist/psychoanalytical

film theories as well, since by uncritically endorsing "distanciation" and detachment (however "passionate" this detachment is said to be) as the "proper"—i.e., politically correct—mode of spectatorship, they to some extent participate in the repression of the feminine typical of the "semiotic system" known as classic narrative cinema.[21]

Men at the Movies

The psychiatrist, the voice of institutional authority who "explains" Norman Bates to us at the end of the film, pronounces matricide to be an unbearable crime—"most unbearable to the son who commits it." In my opinion, though, the crime is "most unbearable" to the victim who suffers it, and despite the fact that a major emphasis of my book is on masculine subjectivity in crisis, its ultimate goals are a deeper understanding of women's victimization—of the sources of matrophobia and misogyny—and the development of female subjectivity, which is continually denied women by male critics, theorists, and artists (as well as by their female sympathizers). Some feminists, however, have recently argued that we should altogether dispense with analysis of masculinity and of patriarchal systems of thought in order to devote full time to exploring female subjectivity. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, has declared that the "project of women's cinema [by which she means also feminist film theory] is no longer that of destroying or disrupting man-centered vision by representing its blind spots, its gaps or its repressed"; rather, she argues, we should be attending to the creation of another—feminine or feminist—vision.[22] Although I fully share de Lauretis's primary concern, I do not agree that we should forego attempting to locate the gaps and blind spots in "man-centered vision." One of the problems with Mulvey's theory was that her picture of male cinema was so monolithic that she made it seem invincible, and so, from a political point of view, feminists were stymied. An analysis of patriarchy's weak points enables us to avoid the paralyzing nihilism of a position which accords such unassailable strength to an oppressive system and helps us more accurately to assess our *own* strengths relative to it. Moreover, I believe we *do* need to destroy "man-centered vision" by beginning to see with our own eyes—because for so long we have been not only fixed in its sights, but also forced to view the world through its lens.

While, as we have seen, some feminists have criticized Mulvey's "inadequate theorization of the female spectator," others have objected to her restriction of the *male* spectator to a single, dominant position, arguing that men at the movies—at least at *some* movies—may also be feminine, passive, and masochistic. Studies like D. N. Rodowick's "The Difficulty of Difference," Janet Bergstrom's "Sexuality at a Loss," and Gaylyn Stud-

lar's "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasure of the Cinema" take issue with the view of sexual difference as organized according to strict binary oppositions (masculinity = activity; femininity = passivity, etc.) and emphasize the bisexuality of *all* human beings and "the mobility of multiple, fluid identifications" open to every spectator, including men.[23] These critics point to certain Freudian pronouncements to the effect that each individual "displays a mixture of the character traits belonging to his own and to the opposite sex."[24] In "Sexuality at a Loss: The Films of F.W. Murnau," for example, Janet Bergstrom refers to this aspect of Freudian theory in arguing that Murnau's films displace sexuality from the female body to the male body and thus carry "a shifting, unstable homoerotic charge" enabling viewers to "relax rigid demarcations of gender identification and sexual orientation."[25] Bergstrom concludes from this analysis that the issue of gender is not pertinent to a psychoanalytically oriented criticism, which ought to stress the bisexuality of all individuals, and should concern only those critics interested in "historical and sociological perspectives"—as if it were possible to divide up the human subject in this way.[26]

A passage from Bergstrom's earlier essay, "Enunciation and Sexual Difference," helps to illuminate the problem involved in considering the male spectator to be similar to the female spectator in his bisexual response. In that essay, Bergstrom had called for attention to be paid to "the movement of identifications, whether according to theories of bisexuality, power relations . . . or some other terms."[27] The weakness of this formulation, however, lies in its assumption that notions of bisexuality can be considered *apart* from power relations. On the contrary, in patriarchy the feminine position alone is devalued and despised, and those who occupy it are powerless and oppressed. The same Freud who spoke of bisexuality also, after all, spoke of the normal masculine "contempt" for femininity.[28] Freud showed very precisely how men tend to repress their bisexuality to avoid being subjected to this contempt and to accede to their "proper" place in the symbolic order. A discussion of bisexuality as it relates to spectatorship ought, then, to be informed by a knowledge of the way male and female responses are rendered asymmetrical by a patriarchal power structure. As Hitchcock films repeatedly demonstrate, the male subject is greatly threatened by bisexuality, though he is at the same time fascinated by it; and it is the woman who pays for this ambivalence—often with her life itself.

An interesting challenge to Mulvey's theorization of male spectatorship has been mounted by critics who have questioned its exclusive emphasis on the male spectator's sadism, man's need to gain mastery over the woman in the course of the narrative. A pioneering essay by Kaja Silverman entitled "Masochism and Subjectivity" and a later study by

Gaylyn Studlar on the films of Josef Von Sternberg stress the male spectator's masochistic pleasures at the movies. In placing emphasis on this aspect of male subjectivity, both critics point to the importance of the preoedipal phase in masculine development. Hitherto, as I have said, many film theorists have insisted on the fact that narrative cinema closely follows the male oedipal trajectory outlined by Freud, and in doing so cements the male spectator into the male Symbolic order. In the Freudian scenario, the child renounces preoedipal bisexuality and the mother as "love object" for "the requirements of the Oedipus Complex," and in the process assumes his castration.[29] Arguing against this view, Gaylyn Studlar generalizes from an analysis of the films Josef Von Sternberg made with Marlene Dietrich to argue that at the cinema we all regress to the infantile, preoedipal phase, submitting ourselves to and identifying (fusing) with the overwhelming presence of the screen and the woman on it. "Castration fear and the perception of sexual difference," Studlar says, "have no importance" in her aesthetic, which aims to "replace" Mulvey's theory with a more benign version of spectatorship. Studlar's model "rejects" a position which emphasizes "the phallic phase and the pleasure of control or mastery" and thus, she maintains, can help deliver feminist psychoanalytic theory from the "dead end" in which it supposedly finds itself.[30]

While I believe that male masochism is indeed an important area for feminists to explore—is, in fact, one of the blind spots or "repressed" aspects of male-centered vision—the point surely is that this masochism, and the preoedipal relationship with the mother in which it is rooted, *are* in fact repressed by the male in adult life, as Studlar at one point acknowledges. For me the crucial question facing feminist theory is, "What are the sources and the consequences *for women* of this repression?" For that matter, what are the sources and consequences of the "dread of woman," of "ambivalence" towards the mother, of the equation of women with death, all of which are mentioned by Studlar as crucial components of the masochistic aesthetic? How do the answers to these questions illuminate the undeniable fact that Mulvey had sought to understand and that Studlar disregards: i.e., that women are objectified and brought under male domination in the vast majority of patriarchal films?

The fact that men are driven to repress their preoedipal attachment to their mothers in acceding to a patriarchal order would seem to invalidate any attempt simply to "replace" a political critique that focuses on the phallic, sadistic, oedipal nature of narrative cinema with an aesthetic that privileges its oral, masochistic, and preoedipal components. As Christian Metz noted some time ago, although cinema is situated in the realm of the Imaginary—of the preoedipal—the male spectator himself has already passed through the Symbolic,[31] has, then, internalized the "normal contempt" for femininity, repressed it in himself, and met—more or less—